

United States Senate

October 9, 2015

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald,

Based on the recent hearing held by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on whistleblowers at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), I am convinced that the culture at the VA remains unchanged; whatever reforms have been put in place remain insufficient to regaining the trust of our nation's veterans.¹

One of the most troubling aspects of the witness testimony was the repeated descriptions of how the VA's information technology systems were still being used by leaders to manipulate patient data. Additionally, in the case of more than one whistleblower who was also a veteran, the VA's IT systems were being used by unauthorized personnel to obtain private medical information of whistleblowers.

Congress has provided the VA with billions of dollars over many years to apply toward improving the IT systems of the Department. We also passed legislation last year that has made the Choice Card available to veterans around the country and given the VA abundant flexibility and resources to ensure that these veterans are seen by competent medical professionals in a timely manner. Yet while more than a year has passed since the national wait list scandal was brought to light by whistleblowers, my office is still being notified of efforts by VA officials to inappropriately close appointments and consults for veterans in order to meet wait time goals. Further, the VA's IT systems are allegedly still unable to create an audit trail with respect to patient records.

Based on this information, please provide answers to the following questions by October 30, 2015:

1. Are directors of VA Health Care Systems and senior staff still able to access the private medical records of their employees who happen to be veterans? If so, when will this be changed?
2. Have all the VA IT systems dealing with patient scheduling and records been updated to accurately capture who accesses them as well as what actions are taken? Please provide a list of all relevant systems and their current progress toward this objective.

¹ Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, "Improving VA Accountability: Examining First-Hand Accounts of Department of Veterans Affairs Whistleblowers," Hearing held September 22, 2015.

3. Have swift punitive personnel actions been taken against VA officials who misrepresent and manipulate data in order to appear to be making improvements when they are not? Please provide examples.
4. What specific actions have you and other senior leaders of the VA taken to ensure that whistleblowers are not retaliated against?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue affecting our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,



John McCain
United States Senator